

# Unfinished Business

## UB 1. Query: Standing with People of Color

Whereas sometimes the Church of the Brethren has taken prophetic stands on racial justice, as when in 1782 and 1797 it held that members could not own slaves;

Whereas sometimes we have been less than prophetic, as when the church has allowed discrimination against People of Color in rituals<sup>1</sup> or allowed People of Color to be forced out of membership such as Mattie Cunningham Dolby;

Whereas violence against People of Color has been increasing in our neighborhoods, cities, and around the world;

Whereas the number of "Hate Groups" has grown to over 800 just in the United States, mostly against People of Color (Statista 2021);

Whereas US Immigration laws have often openly discriminated on the basis of race and have worked to limit or ban refugees seeking peace from the violence from their home countries;

Whereas Jesus taught us that our neighbor is a stranger in need, Luke 10:29-37;

And whereas Paul saw each person as a part of the body, Ephesians 4:1-16;

Therefore, how can the Church of the Brethren stand with People of Color to offer sanctuary from violence and dismantle systems of oppression and racial inequity in our congregations, neighborhoods, and throughout the nation?

Adopted by Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Board August 17, 2021 and passed on to Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Conference.

Todd Reish, District Board Chair

PJ Arndts, District Clerk

Adopted by the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Conference October 9, 2021 and passed on to the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference.

Nick Beam, District Moderator

PJ Arndts, District Clerk

**Action of the 2022 Annual Conference:** District representative Todd Reish explained the origin of the query in the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. Standing Committee delegate Debbie Eisenbise from the Pacific Northwest District pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Kiss Ritual - Actions of Annual Conference, 1835, 1845, and 1875

1 sented Standing Committee’s recommendation. *Annual Conference adopted Stand-*  
2 *ing Committee’s recommendation that the query “Standing with People of Color” be*  
3 *accepted with thanks to the church and district for this important reminder. The con-*  
4 *cerns were answered with this response, which incorporates one amendment:*

5  
6 *We recognize the struggles faced by many of our sisters and brothers of color*  
7 *and believe the church should be agents of change. We encourage congregations,*  
8 *districts, agencies, and other denominational entities to continue to follow the*  
9 *teachings of Jesus by living out the great commandment of loving our neighbor*  
10 *as ourselves. We understand the great diversity that the word neighbor implies.*  
11 *So, we encourage congregations to study the teachings of Jesus and how they*  
12 *apply to our relationships with all people of color, to express solidarity with all*  
13 *people of color, offer sanctuary from all forms of violence, and identify and dis-*  
14 *mantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions, and then*  
15 *begin to live out those findings by being Jesus in the neighborhood.*

16  
17 *Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee’s recommendation that this response*  
18 *now becomes an official statement of Annual Conference.*

19  
20 *Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee’s recommendation that this response to*  
21 *the query on “Standing with People of Color” be implemented through a two-year study/ac-*  
22 *tion process. This will include Southern Ohio-Kentucky District and On Earth Peace col-*  
23 *laborating to develop various materials for congregational, district, and denominational*  
24 *use. Standing Committee members will support and encourage the use of these materials*  
25 *and participation in the process and report back to Annual Conference in 2023 and 2024.*

## 26 27 **2023 Interim Report of the Committee**

28  
29 Between September 2022 and February 2023, the newly formed Standing With  
30 People of Color Committee met eleven times. This committee is composed of  
31 members of the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District collaborating with staff  
32 from On Earth Peace and Mission and Ministry Board. The committee spent  
33 most meetings in the fall of 2022 focused on clarifying objectives and outcomes  
34 hoped-for from the two-year study-action process in their care.

35  
36 Our work during this time included:

- 37 • Taking time to build our relationships and understand the task and mandate.
- 38 • Reaching out to districts to inquire about racial justice activity in their dis-
- 39 tricts and congregations.
- 40 • Compiling an initial list of resources related to discipleship, faith and racism.
- 41 • Inviting racial justice advocates in the denomination to connect with us to
- 42 share stories of their current activities.

43  
44 Several areas of agreement emerged as our committee formed:

- 45 • Any work we do on this issue as Brethren must flow from the biblical call
- 46 to faithfulness and our discipleship to Jesus.

- This study/action process aligns with the the Church of the Brethren Compelling Vision, which states: “Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.”
- The Church of the Brethren has passed numerous Annual Conference statements which speak with conviction on the topic of racism. Nevertheless, the predominantly white mainstream of the church seems to continue to be reluctant to actively address racism inside or outside of the church.
- Despite the faithful engagement and exhortation of many individuals and denominational committees across the years, the Church of the Brethren denomination has invested itself inconsistently in interracial and intercultural understanding and work for racial justice and equity.
- There is a new spiritual and practical reckoning possible, since the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others led to a nationwide outcry.
- We see the possibility for this study/action project to reach beyond the statements of the past. We have begun to describe those possibilities using three objectives.

**OBJECTIVES**

The committee has developed consensus around three main objectives - Connection, Education, and Action - which we plan to share with the larger church for feedback and final development during spring 2023.

**Objective #1 - CONNECTION**

People in the Church of the Brethren tradition who are interested in and/or working for racial justice build sufficient connections to become a relational network.

A relational network of racial justice advocates could continue collaborating long after this process is over. Even if nothing else bears fruit in the process, connecting and empowering racial justice advocates at all levels of the church to work together intentionally would create a new center for ongoing efforts.

**Objective #2 – EDUCATION**

Study the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to our relationships, structures, and systems, to express solidarity with all people of color. This objective has three subgoals which build on each other.

Education Subgoal #1 - Shared language:

Church of the Brethren members will be exposed to five core concepts about racial injustice related to Christian discipleship, providing a common framework for analysis and action. Since many people in the Church of the Brethren may

1 never directly participate in any event or workshop related to this study/action  
2 process, this goal asks us to saturate the Church of the Brethren with key con-  
3 cepts and understanding. Through this goal, only possible with partnership from  
4 agencies and districts, we hope to create meaningful conversations and lay the  
5 groundwork for a future of more effective ministry and greater relevance to our  
6 communities and world.

7

8 Education Subgoal #2 - Resources:

9 Provide a sample of contextually relevant resources about racial justice ready for  
10 use or adaptation in congregations and districts. Our denomination includes  
11 rural and urban congregations, white congregations, congregations of color,  
12 mixed congregations, and congregations from a variety of ethnicities. It also in-  
13 cludes people who are just starting to think about race and racism, and people  
14 who have been learning and working on these issues for some time. We intend  
15 to be able to suggest resources which could be helpful for many of these settings.

16

17 Education Subgoal #3 - District/congregational engagement:

18 Identify and support teams to provide contextually relevant education about  
19 racial justice. The most relevant educational work will happen at the congrega-  
20 tional and district levels, led by leaders from those same contexts and cultures.  
21 We seek to connect with congregational and district leaders who are active on  
22 these issues, or who wish to be, who can help provide educational opportunities  
23 in their own congregation and/or district. This goal will only be possible if teams  
24 identify themselves in each district or in congregations. Doing this as a relational  
25 network (Objective #1) will strengthen and amplify all our efforts.

26

27 **Objective #3 – ACTION**

28 Address specific problems of racial injustice. Identify, amplify, and encourage  
29 the formation of action clusters or organizing initiatives on issues of racial jus-  
30 tice/injustice. The focus is on naming specific practices, policies, or conditions  
31 and building efforts to change them. Initiatives will be at the denominational,  
32 regional, district, and local level.

33

34 This objective calls for experiments in challenging racism, either within the de-  
35 nomination and its institutions, or in our communities and neighborhoods. It  
36 asks us to connect our abhorrence of racism with an equal passion to challenge  
37 and change the contexts where we live, work, and worship. Education about  
38 racism without follow up, or being opposed morally but lacking faithful en-  
39 gagement, leaves inequity in place. Without this commitment to action we run  
40 the risk of repeating the proclamations of the past without resolving to rise in  
41 our generation to do what we can.

42

43

## CONCLUSION

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45 These objectives can only be achieved if they garner enthusiastic involvement  
46 and contributions of ideas, energy, and talent from many corners of the church.

We look forward to working together with the church to build a path forward. 1  
 2  
*O God, in love you have created all people of every race. We are truly grateful 3  
 for the love you have shown us in Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to admit and 4  
 repent of racist attitudes, behaviors, and speech which demean others. In the 5  
 effort to dismantle racism, we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but 6  
 against powers and principalities. Work within our institutions where they keep 7  
 racism alive by continuing practices that distance, demean, or damage. Help 8  
 us speak up whenever we hear the lie that some members of our family are in- 9  
 ferior and others superior. By the power of your Spirit and the grace of Jesus 10  
 the Christ, bind us--every race and every nation--together as your family. Amen 11*

- Committee Members** 13
- Josh Brockway (liaison from Mission and Ministry Board) 14
  - Devin Dixon-Rosario (On Earth Peace) 15
  - Terrilynn Griffith (SO/KY) 16
  - Matt Guynn (On Earth Peace; convenor) 17
  - Robert Jackson (SO/KY) 18
  - Lucas Keller (SO/KY) 19
  - Bruce Rosenberger (SO/KY) 20
  - Christy Schaub (SO/KY) 21
  - Jennifer Quijano West (liaison from Standing Committee) 22
  - LaDonna Sanders Nkosi (Mission and Ministry Board) 23

**Action of the 2023 Annual Conference:** Robert Jackson of the Southern 25  
 Ohio/Kentucky District and Matt Guynn of On Earth Peace presented the report 26  
 of the committee. *The written and oral interim reports of the Standing with Peo- 27  
 ple of Color Committee were received as information for the delegates.* 28  
 29

Bruce Rosenberger of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District and a member of 30  
 the committee presented the rationale for the extension of the term of assign- 31  
 ment. Aaron Gross, Standing Committee delegate from the South/Central In- 32  
 diana District, presented the recommendation of the Standing Committee to 33  
 extend the term of the assignment of the Standing with People of Color com- 34  
 mittee by one additional year to 2025. *The Annual Conference adopted the rec- 35  
 ommendation of the Standing Committee.* 36

**2024 Interim Report of the Committee** 38  
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We are two-thirds of the way through the three-year process that began with the 40  
 Annual Conference of 2022 calling the Church of the Brethren “congregations 41  
 to study the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to our relationships with all 42  
 people of color, to express solidarity with all people of color, offer sanctuary 43  
 from all forms of violence, and identify and dismantle racism and other oppres- 44  
 sions in ourselves and our institutions, and then begin to live out those findings 45  
 by being Jesus in the neighborhood.” 46

1 At the 2023 Annual Conference our committee asked the delegates to extend  
2 our original mandate of two years by one additional year, which the delegates  
3 graciously approved, to complete our work by Annual Conference 2025.

4

5 The intention of the Standing With People of Color response is not to add an-  
6 other statement to the collection of Church of the Brethren statements on  
7 racism. Rather, we seek to provide connection, education, and inspiration for  
8 action on this continuing area of concern. Especially in our predominantly white  
9 denomination, it can be easy to deprioritize conversations and action on racism;  
10 this repeated pattern can leave the Church of the Brethren inhospitable and un-  
11 able to proclaim a gospel that can be heard in the present *kairos* moment.

12

13 We seek to promote education and prayerful conversations about racism within  
14 the Church of the Brethren and to foster a growing sense of the Church of the  
15 Brethren as part of the Revelation 7:9 vision of people of all languages and eth-  
16 nic backgrounds as a part of the family of Jesus Christ.

17

18 We are working to build relationships among those in the Church of the  
19 Brethren who have a passion for addressing racism in church and society. We  
20 are working to foster an awareness that being born into and living in North  
21 American society exposes a person to racism that infiltrates all aspects of life –  
22 even those who desire to authentically follow Jesus.

23

24 During the past year, the Standing With People of Color Coordinating Commit-  
25 tee has held numerous events online and in person to build relationships among  
26 people in Church of the Brethren congregations who are working at antiracism.  
27 Through multiple events, we have equipped people around the denomination  
28 to facilitate Crucial Christian Conversations using 7 Prompts prepared by the  
29 Committee.

30

31 Many who have been trained have gone on to facilitate 7 Prompts conversations  
32 in their own ministry contexts. We rejoice that there have been even more events  
33 sponsored by districts and congregations to build an awareness of the racism  
34 prevalent in our society and to focus on the teachings of Jesus and seek to dis-  
35 mantle racism within our church.

36

37 We began to organize a prayer team to support the Church of the Brethren as  
38 we continue this work.

39

40 In the final year of our mandate, the Coordinating Committee intends to con-  
41 tinue building a team of people who can help Brethren congregations, districts,  
42 and the entire denomination to continue working together to address racism in  
43 the years after our committee's work is completed. Some unfinished aspects  
44 from the perspective of February 2024 when this report was written: pursue re-  
45 lationships across all geographic, ethnic, and cultural segments of the denomi-  
46 nation and all church institutions; consolidate working teams to deepen and

extend this effort; encourage Brethren at all levels to use biblical and other resources that are relevant to one's context and perspective to help educate ourselves and each other; lift up stories of those who are taking action in specific ways to challenge racism and equip more leaders to join them.

We hope to lay a foundation for the deep renewal of the church, to help us more faithfully follow Jesus, dismantling racism where we discover it and becoming a dependable sanctuary from all forms of violence—a Beloved Community that cherishes all people as children of God. We are grateful for your prayerful support for our efforts.

**Committee Members**

- Josh Brockway (Mission and Ministry Board)
- Barbara Daté (Pacific Northwest District, Illinois/Wisconsin District, Intercultural Ministries)
- Devin Dixon-Rosario (On Earth Peace)
- Terrilynn Griffith (Southern Ohio and Kentucky District)
- Matt Guynn (On Earth Peace)
- Robert Jackson (Southern Ohio and Kentucky District, Intercultural Ministries)
- Bruce Rosenberger (Southern Ohio and Kentucky District)
- Christy Schaub (Southern Ohio and Kentucky District)
- Nubwa Josiah (On Earth Peace)